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SUBJECT: ATIKU DISCUSSES 2007 ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

1. (S) SUMMARY: In a two-hour meeting, a relaxed Vice President Atiku Abubakar expressed little concern about the search of his Potomac, Maryland residence and offered his insights on President Obasanjo and PDP party politics. He also expressed concerns about new INEC chairman Maurice Iwu and the potential for INEC to botch yet another election. The Vice President seemed genuinely disturbed by the potential for Obasanjo to manipulate the political system to detriment of the VP's potential presidential bid in 2007. End summary.

2. (S) Ambassador and Polcouns met with Vice President Atiku Abubakar on the evening of 30 August. Atiku was relaxed and seemed to enjoy the almost two-hour discussion. He said that he had fully discussed the DOJ investigation that prompted the search of the Potomac, Maryland residence of his wife Jennifer with the President "several times," and indicated that the two maintained a healthy working relationship.

3. (S) Atiku then turned to domestic politics, commenting that President Obasanjo had crossed several boundaries in his handling of internal PDP issues. The Vice President pointed to a speech he had delivered about two weeks ago where he challenged all the political parties to "abide by their own constitutions" to better abide by Nigeria's Constitution. He said that Obasanjo's manipulation of the party officials continues, but that the deadline for electing new officials is fast approaching. "The ward delegates' terms will expire by the end of September," with the other levels to follow soon after. He expressed concern with Obasanjo's intentions. According to Atiku, while it is unclear if Obasanjo plans to succeed himself, he certainly does not want to release "the reins of power" in the party.

4. (S) The Vice President also expressed concerns about new INEC chairman Maurice Iwu. According to Atiku, Iwu is close with presidential adviser Andy Uba and his brothers, Anambra State strongman Chris and Senator Ugochukwu. He asserted that Iwu and other INEC commissioners maintained close ties to the President and had little room for independent action. He was also concerned about the lackadaisical approach to elections planning and the potential for INEC to botch yet another election. According to Atiku, serious efforts had yet to begin to deal with the logistical problem of distributing and collecting ballots throughout the country and to deal with the flawed 2002 voters list.

5. (S) COMMENT: The Vice President seemed unconcerned about the legal issues arising from the search of his Maryland residence. He did seem genuinely disturbed by the potential for Obasanjo to manipulate the political system to detriment of his own potential presidential bid in 2007. Atiku was more openly critical of President Obasanjo than two months ago, but he never complained about affairs of state, only political maneuverings.
CAMPBELL